

"All the News  
That's Fit to Print"

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## Benjamin Butler

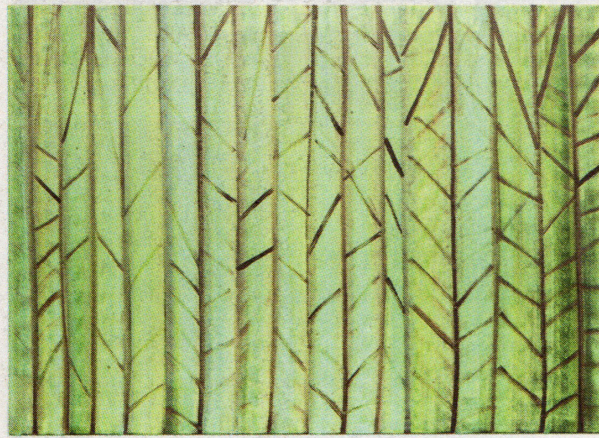
### 'Green Forest'

Klaus von Nichtssagend Gallery  
54 Ludlow Street, near Grand  
Street, Lower East Side  
Through June 8

Benjamin Butler seems to want to be the Robert Ryman of trees and of green, and he's doing an excellent job. Like the work of Mr. Ryman, his paintings achieve complexity within ostensible simplicity, and within very narrow limits, often inviting a classic "are you kidding — my child could do this" response.

For nearly a decade, Mr. Butler has reduced his art to schematic renderings of forests and individual trees, mostly by using some tone of bright, fairly monochromatic green and a combination of fast, loose vertical lines, short diagonals and occasional curves drawn in black (sometimes with pencil) to evoke tree trunks and branches. The results — which also owe something to Milton Avery and Alex Katz — express reverence toward nature and revisit the important role of landscape painting in the pursuit of early abstraction but also feel bracingly contemporary, which is to say nonchalant, stripped-down, skill-resistant and even a little impertinent.

We experience many of the paintings as almost insultingly thin skins of color that have been coaxed into grudging intimations of deep space, dense foliage and filtering daylight. There's very little reworking or overpainting; when there is, it plays a big role in the effect of the image, creating a blurry optical result (in one of the larger works), or intimating new spring leaves or fog (in two smaller ones). The repertory of painting and drawing techniques and of natural effects mustered here is quite impres-



COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND KLAUS VON NICHTSSAGEND GALLERY

Benjamin Butler's "Green Forest," 2013, at the Klaus von Nichtssagend Gallery. His works revere nature.

sive. Few representational painters have managed to rid themselves of quite so much representation and still make pictures.

ROBERTA SMITH